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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [PHUM](#) [MOPS](#) [CE](#)
SUBJECT: SRI LANKA: SENATE FOREIGN RELATIONS STAFF
ASSISTANT LUSE MEETS GOVERNMENT AND CIVIL LEADERS

REF: COLOMBO 1896

Classified By: Ambassador Robert O. Blake, Jr., for reasons 1.4(b,d).

¶1. (SBU) Keith Luse, Professional Staff Assistant to Senate Foreign Relations Committee Senator Richard Lugar (R-IN), visited Colombo November 9-10 to assess country team coordination on military issues and explore the security environment through meetings with prominent Sri Lankans. In meetings outside of the embassy, government and civil leaders emphasized the importance of the US-Sri Lanka bilateral relationship in seeking a political solution to the conflict. Mr. Luse met with Acting Foreign Secretary Geetha de Silva, Sri Lanka Army Engineers Brigadier Chrishanta de Silva (no relation), Foundation for Co-Existence Director Dr. Kumar Rupasinghe, and leading defense analyst and CNN correspondent Iqbal Athas.

Government Lauds US Support

¶2. (C) Ambassador de Silva expressed thanks to Mr. Luse for U.S. support for the Government of Sri Lanka's (GSL) "dual tactics in fighting Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) terrorism," by helping to support the military while encouraging the LTTE to engage in political negotiations. She noted that the GSL has an "intense desire to sit down and talk with the LTTE" and that the international community had persuaded the Tigers to go to peace talks in Geneva October 28-29 unconditionally. "Of course then they kept focusing on the A-9," she lamented, highlighting the Tigers' demand that the land route to the Jaffna peninsula through LTTE-controlled territory be reopened. Likewise, Brigadier de Silva, who directs the Sri Lanka Army's U.S.-trained humanitarian demining unit, lauded the U.S. for training the military to become a professional, apolitical security force.

¶3. (SBU) Mr. Luse expressed support for the GSL's struggle against the terrorist LTTE but emphasized transparency and human rights, noting "Someday this conflict will be over. Reconciliation between the communities will be connected to the behavior of both sides during the conflict. It will be

helpful for the GSL to be able to emphasize that it acted only defensively."

Civil Society Laments Loss of Political Space

14. (C) Dr. Kumar Rupasinghe, director of the leading Foundation for Co-Existence think tank, expressed far less faith in the GSL's commitment to a political solution than did Ambassador de Silva. Speaking to Mr. Luse on the morning of pro-LTTE Member of Parliament Nadarajah Raviraj's murder in Colombo, Rupasinghe worried that "the net is closing even on political figures in Colombo." He claimed that "the President has lost control" and that "the Defense Secretary (President Rajapaksa's brother Gotabaya) and the defense establishment are determined to pursue a military course of action." Rupasinghe said he believed elements of the government were in collusion with the LTTE-breakaway Karuna faction and were involved in a series of abductions in Colombo and the east (reftel). He agreed with Mr. Luse that a public statement from Senator Lugar addressing human rights concerns in Sri Lanka could be helpful. The FCE director asked that the U.S. provide funding for a "major peace-building campaign" that could send a vibrant message of reconciliation through television and radio.

15. (C) Defense analyst Iqbal Athas (protect) lunched with Mr. Luse on November 10. Like Kumar Rupasinghe, he expressed deep concern over Sri Lanka's human rights environment and contended that the political leadership had lost control of the military. He said that the defense establishment makes decisions without consultation and that, in some cases,

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ground commanders do not answer to their superiors. Athas, a former International Visitors Program grantee, asked that Senator Lugar use his influence to support a negotiated settlement to the conflict.

Consistent Message

16. (SBU) Comment: All of Mr. Luse's interlocutors thanked the U.S. Government for its support of the Sri Lankan people. Despite the differing and predictable perspectives of government authorities and civil leaders, all interlocutors emphasized the continued need for the U.S. and the international community to promote the peace process. End Comment.

17. (U) Mr. Luse did not have an opportunity to clear this cable.
BLAKE